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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000432

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2018
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL ZI
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS VIOLENCE

REF: A. HARARE 408
1B. 2006 STATE 63669

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) The most significant crisis facing Zimbabwe today is the ongoing ZANU-PF-directed campaign of violence. Over the last week, the Ambassador has publicly highlighted this violence through a visit to a local hospital on May 9 where approximately 40 victims were being treated, a letter to the government-controlled "The Herald" newspaper, which appeared on May 12 decrying the violence, and a visit to a torture camp and rural hospitals on May 13. Demonstrating it has felt the effects of this high-profile campaign, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Ambassador on May 14 and presented him with a diplomatic note accusing him of interfering in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. END SUMMARY.

Avenues Hospital in Harare

12. (SBU) On May 9, the Ambassador visited Avenues Hospital in central Harare. He was accompanied by Ambassadors from the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany, and Charges from the Netherlands and Angola. (NOTE: The Ambassador hosted a breakfast for SADC Ambassadors on May 7 where he showed a video of the violence and led a discussion on the Zimbabwean crisis (Ref A). He invited SADC representatives to accompany him to Avenues Hospital, but only Angola sent a representative. END NOTE.) Members of the press were also present.

13. (SBU) A hospital director told us that approximately 40 victims of violence from across Zimbabwe were in the hospital. Although adequate medical treatment was not available where they had been injured, many of the patients had been prevented by security forces or their assailants

from traveling immediately to Harare with the result that some injuries had become more serious.

¶ 14. (SBU) A large number of the patients were being treated for severe bruising caused by beatings and broken limbs. All were victims of ZANU-PF violence because of their association with the MDC. The Ambassador spoke with an 80 year-old woman who had been beaten because her grandsons were allegedly MDC supporters. The UK ambassador saw a three year-old boy with an aggravated eye injury. After ZANU-PF thugs burned his family's hut for allegedly having voted for the MDC, he and his family began living in the open in the forest. Some of the same individuals threw stones at his family; he was hit in the eye.

¶ 15. (SBU) We visited three persons who were in the critical care unit. All were totally incapacitated due to severe beatings resulting in broken bones and deep bruising. Two patients, according to hospital authorities, had died the previous night. One succumbed to brain injuries after a screw driver had been driven into his head. The other had been beaten severely in the buttocks and had developed a fatal infection--a week had transpired from the time of his beating to the initiation of medical treatment in Harare.

A Letter to the Press

¶ 16. (U) On May 12, The Herald published a letter from the
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Ambassador in which he decried the violence and noted confirmed reports of over 700 individuals treated for injuries, over 200 persons hospitalized, and at least 20 killed, all as a result of ZANU-PF violence. He vowed to continue developing evidence of the atrocities so that perpetrators could one day be brought to justice.

¶ 17. (U) In a lengthy article, accompanying the Ambassador's letter, The Herald claimed that the government had adopted a zero-tolerance policy toward violence. It accused him of exaggerating the incidence of violence, suggested he lacked evidence, and argued any evidence should have been presented privately to the GOZ. Finally, it claimed that the Ambassador's vow to continue collecting evidence so that the guilty could ultimately be brought to justice was a "naked threat of violence" on his part.

Rimbick Saw Mill and Mvuri Hospital

¶ 18. (U) On May 13, the Ambassador, accompanied by the Ambassadors from the United Kingdom, the European Commission, and Japan, the Tanzanian and Dutch Charges, and Embassy personnel visited rural areas north of Harare where violence had taken place. Several local reporters were along for the entire trip; a South African Broadcasting Corporation team joined us at the Howard Hospital in Chiweshe. A Presbyterian pastor who had been investigating violence served as our guide.

¶ 19. (SBU) We first visited the Rimbick Saw Mill near the town of Mvuri. The manager, somewhat reluctantly, confirmed that the premises had been used as a "torture camp." He said nothing had taken place during the past two weeks. He directed us to a nearby house where interrogations and beatings had allegedly taken place. Outside the house we encountered several men and engaged them in conversation. Several of our group broke away and entered the house where we saw four notebooks. One was titled "Rimbick Commanding Centre" and contained a list of names. A reporter traveling with us managed to take some pictures before the men entered the house and seized the notebooks. Outside the house, we talked to a worker who said he had been beaten. He

identified strips of wood we found near the house as the instruments of the beatings.

¶10. (SBU) We next walked to a small village about two hundred yards from the saw mill. Several women told us beatings had commenced before the March 29 elections and had continued afterward. Both men and women were beaten. The violence had been directed at those believed to have MDC sympathies.

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador and the accompanying group next visited a small hospital in Mvuri, about 10 minutes from the saw mill. The head of the hospital resisted our attempts to visit patients. As it turned out, there was only one victim of violence in the hospital. We were told there had been about 20 or more violence victims, but they had been treated and discharged.

¶12. (SBU) On leaving the hospital, we were accosted by armed police who insisted we accompany them to the nearby police station to discuss our presence. The Ambassador, as spokesman for the group, refused and we began to leave. The police closed the gate to the hospital to prevent us from departing. The Ambassador got out of his car and opened the gate to permit the convoy to leave; he then returned to his car and we proceeded to the Howard Hospital in Chiweshi.

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Chiweshi--Howard Hospital

¶13. (SBU) Howard Hospital is run by the Salvation Army and, with 200 beds, is relatively large for Zimbabwe and well-stocked with medicine. Although the hospital administrator was reluctant to allow visitation, several members of our group talked to patients while the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) briefed the ambassadors and charges.

¶14. (SBU) According to the CMO, the hospital had treated 22 victims of violence in the previous week. These included four women. The injuries were typically beatings to the buttocks, back, and legs.

¶15. (SBU) Patients in the wards confirmed the patterns of beatings. We observed deep bruises on the buttocks of several men and broken feet. One patient, in obvious pain, told us he was a teacher and had served as a polling supervisor. He said he and about 30 others had been rounded up and severely beaten on the buttocks and feet; five of the group had died as a result of their injuries.

Detention of Diplomats

¶16. (SBU) Our convoy was stopped at a police roadblock on the road back to Harare. After initial questioning about what we were doing and where we had been, police demanded diplomatic notes informing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) that we had intended to travel more than 40 kilometers outside of Harare and listing our destinations. The Ambassador explained that we had submitted a Dipnote to the MFA but he had inadvertently left a copy in the Embassy. He offered to provide it upon returning to Harare. This was unacceptable to the police; the police official in charge told us we would have to wait until his supervisor arrived. Police then blocked the road to prevent the convoy from proceeding. Central Intelligence Officials (CIO) and the police supervisor subsequently arrived. After a number of phone calls, we were permitted to leave. The total time of the detention was about one hour.

Ambassador Summoned to the MFA

¶17. (SBU) After returning to the Embassy, the Ambassador had a Dipnote delivered to the MFA stating we had complied with the 40 kilometer requirement and protesting the detention. The following day, the MFA summoned the Ambassador and presented him with a Dipnote in which it reprimanded him for sending the letter to The Herald, which it alleged contained unsubstantiated allegations, without first speaking with the GOZ; called his statements after the Avenues Hospital visit that ZANU-PF was engaging in brutality "inflammatory" and "a clear attempt...to interfere in Zimbabwe's internal affairs;" and accused him of "flout(ing)" "Zimbabwe laws and regulations" by traveling beyond the 40 kilometer limit without notifying the MFA. The Ambassador attempted to respond and to provide MFA officials with a packet of information, including photos, documenting ZANU-PF violations but was told to remain quiet and schedule an appointment if he had anything to say.

Note and Comment on the 40 Kilometer Requirement

¶18. (SBU) Per Ref B, the Embassy sent a Dipnote to the MFA on April 21, 2006, stating that we regarded the 40 kilometer

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requirement as a violation of Articles 25 and 26 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. On May 16, 2006 we received a Dipnote from the MFA "to inform the esteemed Embassy that the notification is a formality not a request for permission. The notification is solely for the security of diplomats and does not, in any way inhibits (sic) free travel of diplomats throughout Zimbabwe..."

¶19. (C) The Embassy did in fact notify the MFA of our travels. Even if we had not, by the MFA's own words there were clearly no Zimbabwean laws and regulations requiring that we do so. The Embassy intends to respond to the MFA's Dipnote of May 14 and clarify that the Vienna Convention guarantees us freedom of movement without notification to the MFA.

COMMENT

¶20. (C) While the police and CIO actions in detaining the diplomatic convoy were clearly unlawful, this is a sideshow to the unremitting violence, and we will continue to focus on the brutality of ZANU-PF. We note that after initially denying violence, the government now admits violence is occurring but says the MDC is to blame for a large part of it. While there has undoubtedly been some MDC retaliation, in our visits to Avenues Hospital last week, and in our visits to Rimbeck, Mvuri, and Chiweshi this week, we encountered no victims of MDC violence. All of the victims with whom we talked described systematic abductions and beatings carried out by ZANU-PF; none said they were victims of MDC violence.

¶21. (C) The reign of violence, designed to punish MDC supporters, as well as intimidate and displace them, is having its intended effect. While there is growing hatred of the ruling party and some victims are determined to vote against ZANU-PF in a runoff election, others now state that opposition is not worth it and that they just want to get on with their lives. Others have fled their rural homes to escape the violence, and still others want to leave the country. The MDC can still attract voters in the rural areas, but the MDC and Tsvangirai must make a concerted effort in these areas to demonstrate to the victims of violence that they have not been forgotten. END COMMENT.

MCGEE